

WYCOMBE Wanderers completed a remarkable story of success under manager Brian Lee on Saturday when they clinched the runners-up spot in the Rothmans Isthmian League. Victory at Ilford and Dagenham's 2-0 defeat at Bishop's Stortford gave the Blues second place and £500 from the sponsors.

It was fitting that the Wanderers boss should go out on a high note. When he came to Loakes Park from Wellington (now Telford), Brian began a seven year period of unrivalled success in the history of the club. Runners-up in his first season, Wycombe won the title for the next two years. Then followed fourth place in 1972-73, the only time Wanderers have been out of the top three.

Rothmans took over in 1973-74 and under Lee's guidance, Wycombe again flourished, winning two more consecutive championships. This term, with a limited squad, he exceeded all expectations to clinch second place.

No-one was more pleased than Brian when Dagenham's result was announced at Newbury Park on Saturday. It was as if he had been rewarded for his contribution to non-league football. Although now finished with the league programme, Brian will still be in charge until July when Ted Powell, one of Lee's former players, takes over the reins as manager.

For Wycombe to clinch the runners-up spot is an outstanding achievement. Only a week or two ago most people were resigned to third or fourth place in Division One. No-one really bargained for such a thrilling end to the season when the Blues won their last four games (including one Anglo-Italian Trophy match), scoring 17 goals and conceding three. In those last few games, Wanderers have played their best football of the season, especially against Dagenham, and Saturday's triumph at Ilford was totally deserved.

Ilford 1, Wycombe Wanderers 3 STUART EARP reports

Many will say 'if only they had played like that earlier in the season'. But Wycombe, in their heart of hearts, know that they really weren't good enough this season to take first place. Consistency is the key to success in a league campaign and Wanderers didn't have it. Nevertheless, their supporters and followers will be thrilled with the runners-up position — and rightly so.

Wanderers' success this term hasn't been earned without a good deal of hard work and sweat, especially on Saturday when temperatures were up in the 80's in London. The ground at Ilford was concrete hard and conditions all round were pretty difficult.

The match was only 19 minutes old when Geoff Anthony won a corner despite being challenged by John Still,

Peter Deadman and Dave Holden. During the melee, the linesman spotted an offence and called over the referee. After a long consultation, referee Colin Downey went over to Still and sent him from the field. He explained afterwards that Still had elbowed Anthony in the face.

But despite playing with 10 men, the home side managed to hold Wycombe in the first half. The closest we came to a goal was via the head of John Delaney who stole up unnoticed to a 44th minute corner and clipped the crossbar. For most of the half the players did their best to overcome the extreme heat.

The first goal came after only two minutes of the new half when Ray Eaton sent a corner short to Terry Reardon. He tried a shot from the edge of the box which seemed to be going wide when

Holden stuck out a boot in a bid to clear and sent the ball crashing into his own net.

Ilford replied with a break by Steve Rogers but Peter Spittle, standing in for John Maskell who was ill, got down well to save. Ilford stuck at the task well and after 61 minutes they drew level with a goal by George Brooks. Anderson pushed the ball through the defence past Keith Mead and Brooks swung in a shot which bounced past Spittle and bobbed slowly over the line.

It took Wanderers only four minutes to regain their lead. Dylan Evans took the ball down on the left and crossed into the box where Holfield netted from six yards. Tony Horseman replaced Howard Kennedy a minute later.

Holfield, whose form in recent matches has been a revelation, went close with a clever chip while at the other end Spittle pulled off the save of the game by tipping Anderson's thunderous drive over the crossbar.

But it was Wycombe who looked more likely to score again, their short, close passing style giving the home side no end of trouble. A glorious move in the 70th minute thoroughly deserved a goal. Anthony put Alexander clear on the right and his cross was met by Horseman. Terry Moore managed to parry Tony's drive and Evans' follow-up shot was headed off the line by Tony Gibson.

The players looked exhausted in the last quarter of the game but the Blues summoned up enough effort to put the result beyond doubt two minutes from time. Horseman withstood Rogers' challenge on the edge of the box and drilled in a shot which Moore pushed onto a post. Evans rushed in to side-foot the ball home.

Enfield, who drew 2-2 at Sutton to take the championship, may have won the major honour this season. But for Wanderers to clinch second spot is an equally fine achievement — and they've done it with only three bookings and some fine football.

ILFORD: T. Moore, A. Gibson, P. Deadman, J. Still, S. Barratt, S. Rogers, P. Anderson, D. Holden (sub R. Mumford 63 mins), G. Brooks, A. Bass, J. Butterfield.

WYCOMBE: P. Spittle, P. Birdseye, K. Mead, J. Delaney, R. Eaton, D. Alexander, T. Reardon, H. Kennedy (sub A. Horseman 66 mins), G. Anthony, D. Evans, M. Holfield.

Referee: C. Downey (Isleworth).
Half-time: 0-0. **Goalscorers,** Wycombe — Holden o.g. (47), Holfield (65), Evans (88). Ilford — Brooks (61).